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DUCKS UNLIMITED TESTIMONY
House Bill 4354 – Ducks Unlimited Specialty License Plate

Greetings Mister Chairman and members of the committee, my name is Russ Terry. I manage Ducks Unlimited's conservation programs in the Great Lakes states, and I work out of our regional office in Ann Arbor. I appear before you today in a few capacities to support a DU specialty license plate. First, I am representing DU as staff of the organization and also as a volunteer of the Michigan chapter of Ducks Unlimited, which has more than 30,000 members. More importantly I appear before you as a life-long resident of Michigan; one who is proud of the natural resource heritage of our state but who is concerned about the fate of our natural resources and particularly how to fund future natural resource conservation opportunities.

Passage of a DU specialty license plate will play a significant role in the future of wetlands and related habitats in Michigan; a future that is important not only for all current residents, including my two beautiful young daughters who love to swim and go fishing, but also to the people that will come after us.

Wetlands are much more than places for ducks and geese. We know that wetlands are important to more than 900 species of plants and animals, many of which are threatened or endangered. The presence of wetlands and the plants and animals that depend upon them are important to society not only from a recreational and economic perspective, but also from a more basic fundamental enrichment of our lives. Wetlands enhance our quality of life! Pure Michigan!

Wetlands are also important to us for other reasons related to our health and welfare. They act as nature's ground water filtration system. They serve an important role as nature's sponge, helping to soak up waters and reduce the effects of flooding. They also clean surface water, and have the capacity to make huge improvements to water quality in inland lakes, rivers and ultimately the Great Lakes. Fourteen other states thought the DU license plate was a good idea, and have passed similar legislation, *including the Great Lakes states of Wisconsin, Ohio, Indiana and Pennsylvania.*

Passage of a Ducks Unlimited license plate will do great things for Michigan, especially during these trying economic times. Approximately 50 percent of our wetlands in Michigan have been lost, with some regions, such as Saginaw Bay and Lake Erie having lost more than 80 percent. The federal government and the Great Lakes states are implementing a plan to restore the Great Lakes – but that is going to take a significant amount of funding. A DU license plate holds the promise of providing additional funds to help restore and protect wetland habitat because DU will restrict all of the revenue from the sale of the license plate for use on wetland conservation in Michigan.

DU has a track record of matching our funding at least 4 to 1. All funding we receive from the sale of DU license plates can be leveraged with federal, state and private grants, as well as dollars from corporations and foundations, to drastically increase the pot of funding available for Michigan habitat conservation. This funding will be used to protect and restore wetlands, and in doing so, employ not only DU staff in the state, but also contractors and other businesses that help us do our work – so it will help to stimulate the economy.

Ducks Unlimited is the largest private, non-profit wetlands conservation organization in the world, having been involved in the conservation of more than 12 million acres of habitat across North America. Our Regional Office in Ann Arbor employs 43 people that work in an 18 state area conserving wetlands through voluntary, incentive-based programs. Right here in Michigan, Ducks Unlimited has conserved more than 66,000 acres of habitat, consisting of more than 1,400 projects, with an investment of over \$20 million dollars.

Wetlands conservation is expensive. On average, it costs approximately \$1,000 for each acre of habitat restored. That is why a DU specialty plate holds such promise. Currently, there are more than 30,000 Ducks Unlimited members in Michigan. Ducks Unlimited members are passionate about conserving wetlands and that passion translates into generosity with their donations to Ducks Unlimited to further the interests of habitat conservation. Therefore, the potential exists for significant revenue to be generated by the participation of Ducks Unlimited members alone in the registration opportunities that a specialty plate will create if it becomes law. We are confident that the DU license plate will appeal to non-DU members as well.

We anticipate selling a minimum of 10,000 license plates, which will generate \$250,000. Given the fact that Ducks Unlimited typically leverages each dollar 4 times, the net affect will be an expected \$1 million dollars or more for wetland conservation just from the sale of the plate. DU also will receive \$10 for each DU license plate renewal and will turn each renewal into at least another \$50 for Michigan habitat conservation. In essence, this bill will generate far reaching conservation benefits for all of Michigan's residents, both humans and wildlife.

In summary, Mister Chairman and members of the committee, a DU specialty plate presents residents of Michigan the unique opportunity of supporting wetlands conservation while doing something that they have to do anyway if they own a vehicle – annually registering it. This bill will provide a *voluntary* mechanism for Michigan residents to show their *support* for the habitat conservation efforts of Ducks Unlimited, while also providing an *economic stimulus* by creating jobs and providing employment when we conduct our wetland restoration projects. Sounds like Pure Michigan to me! Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to speak before you today. I will be happy to answer any questions that you may have.